

We joined Literacy Connexus . . .

I serve with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship among refugees in Texas. One of the major challenges for refugee families is learning English. Their children learn English in school but it is much more difficult for the parents and preschool children, as they speak their native language in the homes.

Last spring, in partnership with Literacy Connexus, we began talking about what a reading initiative/reading fair might look like among one of the refugee groups. We asked [Agape Ebenezer Karen Baptist Church](#) in Fort Worth if they would be interested in working together on an Early Childhood reading readiness program with Karen parents and three and four year-olds. The Karen leaders were interested but expressed concern for teaching their children to read both the Karen language and English. Would there possibly be a way we could help them do both?



Here is where the body of Christ with its multiple gifts, talents, and resources began working together. The Karen church applied for a [LifeCall](#) grant from Texas Baptists. Monies from that grant were used to purchase Karen books in Thailand and ship them here. These Karen readers were placed in a library to be loaned to church members, and a beautifully illustrated Karen children's Bible was purchased for each family to be given at the reading fair.

With the help of women from Agape Baptist Church, Western Hills Baptist Church, and Broadway Baptist Church, a four week Early Childhood Literacy project was designed and implemented with the Karen families. The Karen children and parents had books read to them, sang children's songs, and learned basic shapes and other preschool concepts. Although they spoke limited English, the parents were taught the importance of reading to their children, and told that they could use their tradition of storytelling in Karen to tell the stories in the books. Each week the families received a new children's book and learning activities to take home. The program culminated with a reading fair at Agape Baptist church.

Again, the body of Christ worked together. Members of Lakeshore Drive Baptist Church built 42 bookshelves, while First Baptist Richardson built 11 bookcases. Literacy Connexus funded the building supplies, and Agape Baptist Church youth painted and stained. Tri-Rivers Association Women on Missions and Girls Scouts from Aledo donated books. CBF project funds paid for the books for the reading program along with an English children's illustrated New Testament for each family. Church members from Ash Creek Baptist Church volunteered at the event. As an added bonus, Cornerstone Christian Assistance donated new warm winter coats for all of the children.



The reading fair was a huge success and blessing to the Karen families. The children and adults carefully decorated the bookcases and shelves with stickers. They selected several bags of children's books and were read to by the volunteers from Ash Creek Baptist Church. Many families began proudly arranging their books on their bookcases. As a way to express their thanks, the Karen families joyfully sang in Karen to us.

What a blessing to be a part of a community of believers, each giving their gifts of time, talent, and resources for God's glory and ministry to our Karen brothers and sisters.

Karen Morrow

CBF field personnel assigned to refugee ministry

